2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

On the way back to Sharjah we passed a squat, white building about two miles from the town. It was built by a wealthy merchant of Dubai and presented to the town as a lazar, or leper hospital. Yet to this day it has never been used, for the local tradition is that it is haunted by a djinn, or evil spirit. Arabs suffering from leprosy, who have been turned out of the town, will prefer to stay in the open desert than enter the accursed house. Belief in djinns is very strong in Oman, though I have never before heard of a new building being haunted. It is probable, as with Chinese houses, that they are considered to be unlucky if they are built on a spot which has an evil reputation and is not protected by *fung-shui*, as the Cantonese call 'fortunate winds'.

That evening, accompanied by two officers from the Fort, I attended an Arab wedding which was held outside the sheikh's palace. The bridegroom was one of our mechanics; he already possessed one wife and three children, but he had recently been given a rise in pay and, being a true follower of the Prophet, wished to increase the dignity of his household. The marriage ceremony was held in the mosque and directly the happy couple emerged they were surrounded by a vast crowd of relatives, friends and sightseers. A small band, consisting of drums and pipes, led the procession, which soon grew to two or three hundred persons. Behind the band was the bridegroom, seated on a camel with two of his sons, his eyes tightly bandaged so that he should not see his bride, who followed blushingly on a donkey.

The procession halted in front of the palace and a rhythmic tune of pipe and drum sent the onlookers into a frenzied dance, in which we were expected to join. A young man in a green turban, whom I recognized as one of our bearers, leapt into the middle of the dancers and began to sing a passionate love-song. There was a good deal of abandon, giggling amongst the women, and flirtation, all the usual Arab restraint being flung to the winds. The music and dancing continued until sunset, when torches and flares were lit and the procession repaired to a village two miles away. We did not attend the nuptial feast, which I heard later ended in an orgy, with several broken heads, as I had another engagement at the Iraqui Levies' camp. I felt very sorry for the bridegroom's first wife; she was a sad and lonely figure on her little brown donkey, and seemed to be the only one who did not enjoy the carousing. This was not surprising,

63 Simmons et al G-5 (1941-1951) 1954
M1 Middle East
TRUCIAL OMAN MK4

Public health and medical services are almost nonexistent. One 12-bed private hospital was in operation in Dibai, the largest town, in 1951. In addition, a dispensary was maintained by the Petroleum Development (Trucial Coast) Ltd., mainly for the benefit of its employees. Temporary clinics are established at Dibai from time to time by medical personnel from the mission hospital at Muscat. Water supplies are scarce and limited to the northern section of the territory: the littoral west of Abu Dhabi is arid and virtually uninhabited. Water for domestic use and for irrigation is obtained from wells, springs and rain-water cisterns.

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